

Essential Oils - How and Where to Use Them

Story at-a-glance

- ▶ Essential oils may help relieve symptoms of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- ▶ Essential oils may relieve stress and anxiety, help you sleep, support pain relief and boost energy
- ▶ Instructions include for how to use essential oils via massage, inhalation, bath or facial lotion

By Dr. Mercola

Essential oils are concentrated, aromatic plant extracts that have been used for thousands of years for emotional, cosmetic, medical and even spiritual purposes. The term "essential oil" actually comes from the idea of "quintessential oil."

Aristotle believed that in addition to the four physical elements (fire, air, earth and water) there was a fifth element, quintessence. This was considered to be the "spirit" or life force of the plant.¹

Today, essential oils are extracted from plants via two primary methods, distillation, which has been used since ancient times, and expression or cold pressing, which is used to extract citrus essential oils.

Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, physicians including Hippocrates, Galen, and Crito, promoted the therapeutic use of scents, . Even the plague was treated with fragrances!²

Pharmaceuticals edged out the use of essential oils in the 19th century, but now, however, they're making a strong comeback.

What Are the Benefits of Using Essential Oils?

There are probably as many uses for essential oils as there are varieties, but research shows particular promise in relieving stress, pain and nausea, stabilizing your mood, and improving sleep, memory and energy levels.

As noted by the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy (NAHA):³

"It [Aromatherapy] seeks to unify physiological, psychological and spiritual processes to enhance an individual's innate healing process."

Anxiety is one health condition for which essential oils may be particularly beneficial.

A systematic review of 16 randomized controlled trials examining the anxiolytic (anxiety-inhibiting) effects of aromatherapy among people with anxiety symptoms showed that most of the studies indicated positive effects to quell anxiety (and no adverse events were reported).⁴

Sweet orange oil, specifically, has been found to have anxiety-inhibiting effects in humans, supporting its common use as a tranquilizer by aromatherapists.⁵

Further, a blend of peppermint, ginger, spearmint and lavender essential oils has been found to help relieve post-operative nausea,⁶ while lavender aromatherapy has been shown to lessen pain following needle insertion.⁷ Essential oils have even been suggested as a replacement for antibiotics.⁸

Essential Oils May Impact Your Brain's Emotional Center

According to the National Cancer Institute's PDQ online database, one way essential oils work is via your brain's limbic system:⁹

"The effects of aromatherapy are theorized to result from the binding of chemical components in the essential oil to receptors in the olfactory bulb, impacting the brain's emotional center, the limbic system.

Topical application of aromatic oils may exert antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic effects.

Studies in animals show sedative and stimulant effects of specific essential oils as well as positive effects on behavior and the immune system. Functional imaging studies in humans support the influence of odors on the limbic system and its emotional pathways."

Essential oils also contain three different types of medicinal organic compounds called terpenes, each with its own set of benefits:

- Phenylpropanoids have antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral activity. As noted by Healthy Holistic Living, "phenylpropanoids clean the receptor sites on the cells. Without clean receptor sites, cells cannot communicate, and the body malfunctions, resulting in disease."¹⁰

Oils that contain this type of terpene include: [clove](#), cassia, basil, cinnamon, oregano, anise, and peppermint.

- Monoterpenes, which are found in most essential oils, help "reprogram miswritten information in the cellular memory."¹¹
- Sesquiterpenes help deliver oxygen to your tissues, which makes it more difficult for viruses, bacteria, and potentially even cancer cells, to survive.

Essential oils that contain sesquiterpenes include cedarwood, vetiver, [spikenard](#), sandalwood, black pepper, patchouli, myrrh, ginger, and frankincense.

Essential Oils May Help Relieve Autism Symptoms

Many parents report success in using essential oils to ease symptoms associated with [autism](#), especially at bedtime or while transitioning from one activity to another (which is often difficult for autistic children).

It may not work for everyone, but it's natural, non-invasive and easy to apply, so there are far more advantages to trying it than not. Among the success stories is one mother who diffuses Roman chamomile into her son's room at night, which has helped him to sleep.

She also uses frankincense, orange, or vetiver (a type of Indian grass). She told The Epoch Times:¹²

"Vetiver really seems to calm him. When I get vetiver oil on him, it can pretty quickly end the meltdown. I always have it handy so I can get him to breathe it in. I do see a shortened time period of rage when he is having a meltdown. It has been a definite help."

Ohio State University (OSU) researchers are even planning a study to determine if essential oils may help with emotional and behavioral challenges faced by children with autism. It's likely they could help with other conditions as well.

Essential Oils Show Promise for Relieving Symptoms of ADHD, Boosting Emotional Health

Research by Dr. Terry Friedmann showed, for instance, that [vetiver oil](#) was beneficial for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). When the children inhaled the oil regularly for 30 days they had improved brain wave patterns and behavior and did better in school.

Eighty percent of the children also improved when using cedarwood oil similarly.¹³ Since there is variation in how different people respond to different oils, the Ohio State researchers plan to use a *blend* of oil in their autism study. The Epoch Times continued:¹⁴

"There is some trial and error involved ... parents have found that an essential oil that works for one kid's ASD [autism spectrum disorder], may not necessarily work for another.

So instead of just looking at single oils, OSU researchers will evaluate two mixtures of 18 essential oils typically used by parents for treating ASD symptoms.

'We believe the blends improve the ability to relax even more so than an individual oil by itself,' [OSU researcher Dr. Jill] Hollway said.

'Some people only use lavender oil, or sandalwood, but we are studying multiple oils because we feel that this would give us an increased boost of relaxation.'

The infographic that follows, from Holland & Barrett, shows additional ways you can use essential oils to help manage your emotions.^{15,16}

How to Use Essential Oils

If you're using essential oils simply because you like their scent, they should be diluted in a carrier oil or water (for misting) first before you apply them to your skin. Contrary to popular belief, to get the most scent out of an essential oil fragrance on your body, you needn't apply it to your pulse points.

It's commonly thought that increased heat in these areas helps to diffuse the scent, but in reality the temperature of your skin doesn't vary much from place to place. To get the most lasting scent, spray a mixture of essential oil and water onto your shirt collar or hair, where the oils will take longer to evaporate.¹⁷

NAHA has compiled instructions for additional ways to use essential oils, including via massage, inhalation, bath or facial lotion, as follows.¹⁸ For more information on which essential oils to use for different purposes, check out the [Ultimate Guide to Herbal Oils](#).

Massage Oil

For infants and young children:

.5 to 1% dilution = 3 to 6 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier

For adults:

2.5% dilution = 15 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier

3% dilution = 20 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier

5% dilution = 30 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier

10% dilution = 60 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier

Essential oils used in massage blends are often used for:

Stress/anxiety
Headaches/migraines
Insomnia
Chronic or acute pain relief
Arthritis & rheumatism (sub-acute phase)
Chronic muscular/joint aches and pain
Pregnancy and childbirth massage
Reducing inflammation
Enhancing immunity
Relieving muscle spasms
Relax and soothe the nervous system
Aid in the treatment of sprains, strains, and repetitive movement injuries

Steam Inhalation

Place 3 to 7 drops of essential oil into boiling water. Some essential oils to consider include eucalyptus, thyme, lemon and tea tree. Cover head with towel and breathe through the nose. Keep eyes closed! Steam inhalation of essential oils may be used for:

- Congestion in upper respiratory tract (cold or flu)
- Sinus infection or sinusitis
- Enhancing respiratory function

Bath

Add 2 to 12 drops (depending on essential oil) into a teaspoon of honey, whole milk, vegetable oil or other dispersing agent then add to bath once you are in the bath. This is often used to:

Reduce stress/anxiety
Alleviate muscular aches, pains, and tension
Soothe mental or physical fatigue
Stimulate circulation
Enhance lymph circulation
Reduce pain and stiffness
Increase local circulation
Improve tone and health of skin
Aid detoxification

Facial Cream

You can purchase unscented facial creams or body lotions to add essential oils to or create a facial oil by using a variety of vegetable/herbal oils [such as coconut oil] and then adding essential oils into the mix.

For adults:

Sensitive skin: .5 to 1 percent dilution = 3 to 6 drops per ounce

Normal, healthy skin: 1 to 2.5 percent dilution = 6 to 15 drops per ounce

Essential oil facial creams may help:

Enhance wound healing

Influence and slow aging of skin

Scar reduction and improve appearance

Support and enhance immune cells of the skin

Balance sebum production

Aid the process of detoxification in the skin

Increase local circulation

Improve tone of skin

Encourage hydration of the skin, when used in conjunction with hydrosol/water or cream.

Soften and soothe the skin

Address emotional issues